

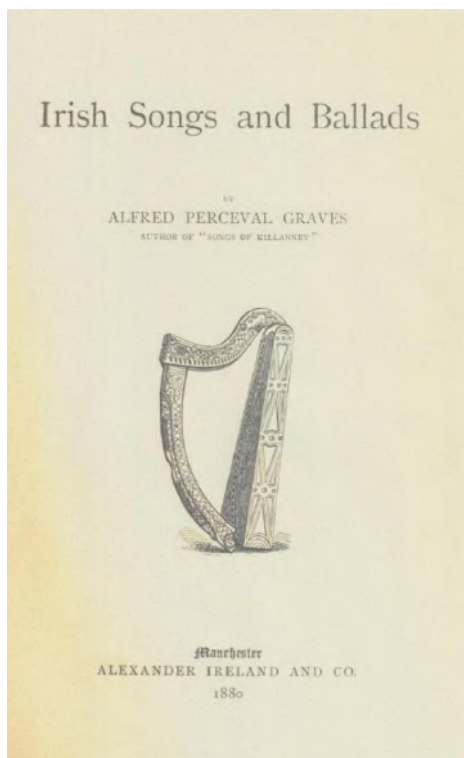
Stanfordian Thoughts

**A periodical series of reflections on recorded and unrecorded works by Charles Villiers Stanford
by Christopher Howell**

18. Father O'Flynn

A favourite with our grandparents, the rollicking Irish song *Father O'Flynn* has rather faded from view. Today you are more likely to hear, from bands specializing in traditional Irish music, a lively jig that often goes under this name but would more properly be called *The Top of Cork Road*. Recordings in the years 1899-1931 applied lax standards to the labelling of their wares. Since *Father O'Flynn* as a song is mainly hunted down by collectors of old recordings, you will find it described variously as composed by Stanford, arranged by Stanford, a work by A.P. Graves and an Irish traditional melody. There is part truth in all of these, so let me try to sort it out.

A.P. Graves's claim to be the author of the words is not usually doubted, but there has been a suggestion that they originated in a broadsheet published by the Poet's Box of Dundee. Anyone can put things on the Internet, but this is from the site of the National Library of Scotland¹, which lends it some authority. They suggest a date c.1880-1900 and remark that "Father O'Flynn's name has a definite Irish origin and the lyrics of the song refer to areas in and the ideals of Ireland. ... It is not clear from this sheet though whether the lyrics were written in Dundee or if they were copied directly from an existing Irish tune. ... Musical notation was rarely printed, as tunes were usually established favourites". So, apparently, anonymous words to an unidentified traditional tune.



Alfred Perceval Graves (1846-1931) published this poem – identical apart from some disagreement over how to spell the Irish dialect – in *The Spectator* in 1875², included it in his *Irish Songs and Ballads*³ in 1880 and subsequently, in 1889, in *Father O'Flynn and Other Irish Lyrics*⁴. So, if the question is asked whether Graves drew on the broadsheet or whether the broadsheet was pirated Graves, unless a much earlier date could be proved for the broadsheet, the answer is clearly the latter.

More than fifty years later, Graves described the genesis of the poem.

"Father O'Flynn" was taken from real life ... His prototype was the Rev. Michael Walsh, parish priest of Kilcrohane, Co. Derry, who was all and more than I described him to be ...

I suppose it was sudden inspiration that made me write the song. I remember clearly composing it in the spring of 1875 while I was walking across the three parks – Hyde Park, Green Park and St. James' Park – from Oxford and Cambridge Mansions to the Home Office, where I was a clerk. It was composed to a Kerry variant of

"The Top of the Cork Road" – a tune to which I had often danced the Irish jig. At the Home Office I sat

¹ <https://digital.nls.uk/broadsides/view/?id=15071>, retrieved 2.9.2023.

² Dictionary of Irish Biography [https://www.dib.ie/biography/graves-alfred-perceval-a3582#:~:text=Graves%2C%20Alfred%20Perceval%20\(1846%E2%80%93John%20Cheyne%20\(qv\).](https://www.dib.ie/biography/graves-alfred-perceval-a3582#:~:text=Graves%2C%20Alfred%20Perceval%20(1846%E2%80%93John%20Cheyne%20(qv).), retrieved 2.9.2023.

³ Alexander Ireland and Co., Manchester 1880

⁴ Swan Sonnenschein and Co., London 1889.

down at my desk and wrote the song straight off. I sent it to "The Spectator", in which it appeared the following week. "Father O'Flynn" did not appear as a song until it was published in a collection of *Fifty Irish Songs arranged to my words by my friend Villiers Stanford (Sir Charles Stanford)*⁵. He was actually against publishing it as not being serious enough but I persuaded him.

The song sailed into success then, and earned a great deal of money. Unfortunately I didn't share it to any extent. I sold my rights in the *Fifty Songs* to Boosey's for £80, so that "Father O'Flynn" brought me one-fiftieth of £80. Only in the last few years have I got anything else from it – a few pounds a year for gramophone and broadcasting rights. Stanford, who had a royalty in the song, made his thousands out of it, and how many thousands Boosey made I have no right to enquire.⁶

While Graves emphasized his friendship with Stanford, his son, the poet, novelist and essayist Robert Graves (1895-1985), gave a slightly different twist to the story:

He had put the words to a traditional jig tune of "The Top of Cork Road", which he remembered from his boyhood. Sir Charles Stanford supplied a few chords for the setting. My father sold the complete rights for one guinea⁷. Boosey, the publisher, made thousands. Sir Charles Stanford, who drew a royalty as the composer, also collected a very large sum. Recently my father has been sent a few pounds from gramophone rights. He is not bitter about this, but has more than once impressed me almost religiously never to sell for a sum down the complete rights of any work of mine whatsoever.⁸

So what did Stanford do and did he deserve his royalties?

Firstly, A. P. Graves referred to the rights of *Fifty Songs of Old Ireland* as a whole. Stanford's setting of *Father O'Flynn* was deliberately simple though, as will be seen, more than "a few chords" were involved. Many of the other arrangements, though, were imaginative and creative, if to a lesser degree than in his later collections. So, taken as a whole, he deserved his fee. But was this really a "traditional jig tune" that Graves "remembered from his boyhood"?

Songs of Old Ireland acknowledges three sources for its tunes: the Petrie Collection⁹ and those of Bunting¹⁰ and Joyce¹¹. *The Top of Cork Road* was taken from Joyce ... or was it? Joyce's collection appeared two years before A.P. Graves wrote his poem, so might have served to remind him of a tune he had known as a boy. The tune as recorded by Joyce, though, is substantially different from that of the Graves/Stanford collaboration. In Appendices 1 and 2, I give the tune as it appears in Joyce and as in the most commonly used of Stanford's two arrangements – more if this later. Since MWI caters for music lovers of all kinds, not only

⁵ *Songs of Old Ireland, the words by Alfred Perceval Graves, the music arranged by C. Villiers Stanford*, Boosey 1882.

⁶ *Opunake Times*, Volume XXXI, Issue 3177, 31 July 1928, page 1:

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/OPUNT19280731.2.2?query=charles>, retrieved 2.9.2023.

⁷ For what it is worth, one fiftieth of £80 makes one pound twelve shillings, whereas the old guinea was worth one pound one shilling.

⁸ Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That*, Jonathan Cape 1929.

⁹ Mostly still in manuscript in 1882, later edited for publication by Stanford: *The Complete Collection of Irish Music as Noted by George Petrie. LL.D., R.H.A. (1789-1866), Edited, From the Original Manuscripts, by Charles Villiers Stanford*, Boosey 1905 (for the Irish Literary Society of London). Dover reprint 2003. Petrie published some airs from his collection, with extensive notes and harmonized for piano (Gill, Dublin 1855) and a fragment of his projected second volume was published in 1882 (again by Gill, Dublin).

¹⁰ *A General Collection of the Ancient Irish Music, Containing a Variety of Admired Airs never before Published and also the Compositions of Conolan and Carolan, Collected from the Harpers &c. in the different Provinces of Ireland, and adapted for the Piano-Forte with a Prefatory Introduction by Edward Bunting*, W. Power and Co., Dublin 1796.

¹¹ *Ancient Irish Music: comprising one hundred airs hitherto unpublished, many of the old popular songs, and several new songs, Collected and Edited by P. W. Joyce, LL.D., M.R.I.A. The Harmonies by Professor Glover*, McGlashan and Gill, Dublin 1873.

those who read music, I will briefly describe the differences. You can also follow this up by listening to virtually any Irish dance band playing *The Top of Cork Road* and to one of the historical recordings of the song – that by Peter Dawson is easily found. The first bar – the first five notes – are identical. The second bar is identical except for the first note, but that single note changes the whole character of the music. The third is almost identical, the fourth completely different, the fifth identical, the next quite different and the first half of the tune finishes almost identically. In the second part, the Stanford/Graves vaguely replicates the downward movement of the melody, but essentially parts company until the last two bars. Apart from the variants in the notes, there is another overriding difference. *The Top of Cork Road* sets up a continuous quaver (eighth-note) movement that is doubtless ideal for dancing but a little monotonous for passive listening. *Father O'Flynn* stops and starts to suit the words. According to classical canons, it is a better shaped, more interesting melody. But how did it get like that?

Graves spoke of “a Kerry variant”, so was he – and logically Stanford too, since they were boyhood friends – remembering a version he or they heard when they were children, a version not otherwise recorded in folk music collections? Or did Stanford the composer step in and mould the tune to fit Graves’ poem? Are there other recorded versions of *The Top of Cork Road*? O’Neill¹² tells us that

The old favorite jig, “The Top of Cork Road”, rendered still more famous by Mr. Graves as “Father O’Flynn”, found its way into five English collections of country dances by different authors in the years 1770 to 1781, being named “Yorkshire lasses” in four of them.

The earliest appearance of *Yorkshire Lasses* of which I find mention is in *Bride’s Collection of 200 Select Country Dances*, issued by Longman, Lukey & Broderip in 1776. I haven’t found a copy of this, but in Appendix 3 I give an incomplete version – only the first part has survived – from a 1799 manuscript by John Miller of Perth, Scotland. The striking feature here is that, in place of the bold arpeggio in the opening bar, the melodic contour is softened. This occurs in all other versions of *Yorkshire Lasses* that I have seen. Though the rest is similar to *The Top of Cork Road*, this is in character further removed still from the Graves/Stanford *Father O’Flynn*. Graves’ “Kerry variant” will not be found in any of the earlier printed collections, evidently. Graves’ younger brother Charles Larcom Graves¹³, whose memories of Irish fiddlers seem not to have been of the happiest, gave this account:

[Irish] fiddlers are ... in considerable request at bonfires, weddings, or at the cross roads where the boys and girls of the village come to dance on Sunday afternoons, but I have never yet known an Irish rustic fiddler who produced a tolerable tone, or possessed any knowledge of, or instinct for, harmony. As timekeepers they are excellent, and the tunes which they play are spirited and characteristic. The tune of “Father O’Flynn”, for example, was picked up by ear in this way from a Kerry fiddler and noted down from the whistling of the gentleman who had so heard it.¹⁴

Charles Larcom might have clarified whether the person who noted it down was Joyce – who makes no comment on its provenance – or his brother Alfred Perceval. Or even Stanford, for a further account muddies the waters still further:

Another version of the origin of this song is from James Bland of Derryquin Castle, who was a student at Trinity College Dublin at the same time as his cousin A. P. Graves and Sir Charles Stanford. In a

¹² *The Dance Music of Ireland. 1001 Gems ... Collected and Selected ... and Edited by Capt. Francis O’Neill*, Lyon & Healy, Chicago 1907, p. 5

¹³ 1856-1944, Music critic and humourist, on the editorial staff of *The Spectator* and *Punch*.

¹⁴ C.L. Graves, *Musical Talent in Ireland*, Musical Times 1 October 1886, pp.579-82.

piece in the "Irish Times" newspaper Bland says the three were socialising in his rooms and he was whistling a jig, an old tune known as "The Top of the Cork Road" that his nurse had often sung to him when a child in Derryquin. Stanford asked him to sing it again & took down the music; turning to Graves he said "You must put words to this tune".¹⁵

One objection to this story is that Stanford, insofar as our sketchy knowledge of his early years allows us to say, was never a student at Trinity College, Dublin. He did study privately with musicians who taught there and he was certainly a boyhood friend of A. P. Graves, whose family¹⁶ leased a property on the Bland estate at Parknasilla. There is nothing implausible, then, about the three of them socializing in Bland's rooms. I find no evidence that the Blands and the Graves were cousins. It is a pity that the writer does not give a reference to the piece in the *Irish Times*, which he may be quoting inexactly from memory. If we are to give any credence to this story, the conception of *Father O'Flynn* has to be backdated, since A. P. Graves moved to London in 1869 and Stanford left Ireland in 1870. This can be overcome if we speculate that Graves did not immediately succeed in writing the poem and found the inspiration to do so in 1875 as he described.

So there is at least the possibility that the tune was taken down by Stanford himself. This brings us no nearer to knowing what the Stanford-notated *Top of Cork Road* was like. There is a suspicion that his composerly instincts may have induced him to write, not what Bland was whistling, but what he felt Bland ought to have been whistling. When Graves' words arrived, moreover, further topping and tailing would have been required to make them fit the tune. As remarked above, *Father O'Flynn* the song is, by the canons of western classical music, a stronger, more shapely composition than *The Top of Cork Road*. So, unless somebody can produce a notated version of this tune, prior to Joyce, which corresponds to the Graves/Stanford song, the conclusion must be that *Father O'Flynn* as our grandparents sang it is about fifty per cent Stanford's own work, resembling the original folk tune mainly at the beginning and end. Stanford would seem to have deserved his royalties after all.

This runs counter to the methods of both Graves and Stanford, as described by Plunket Greene:

If the poems were not right in detail they were frankly criticized, as the letters show, and were immediately remodelled either in bulk or in detail. ... This was high testimony to Graves, for in the nature of things criticism had to be practically all on one side. To him the tune was as holy as to his colleague – a matter of honour which neither transgressed.¹⁷

Perhaps this early collaboration predated these higher-minded ideals. Greene's account of *Father O'Flynn* creates further confusion, but confirms Graves' recollection that Stanford originally did not want to include it:

... Stanford wrote to say that he had been approached by Boosey to bring out for them a Collection of Irish Songs and asked if he would write the lyrics for them. He accepted the idea at once, and sent him a dozen which he had just written to some of the Petrie tunes. ... Among these ... was one called "Father O'Flynn" fitted to a jig-time lively air. Stanford accepted them all except this one, to which he demurred as being a comic song and not suited to a serious collection.

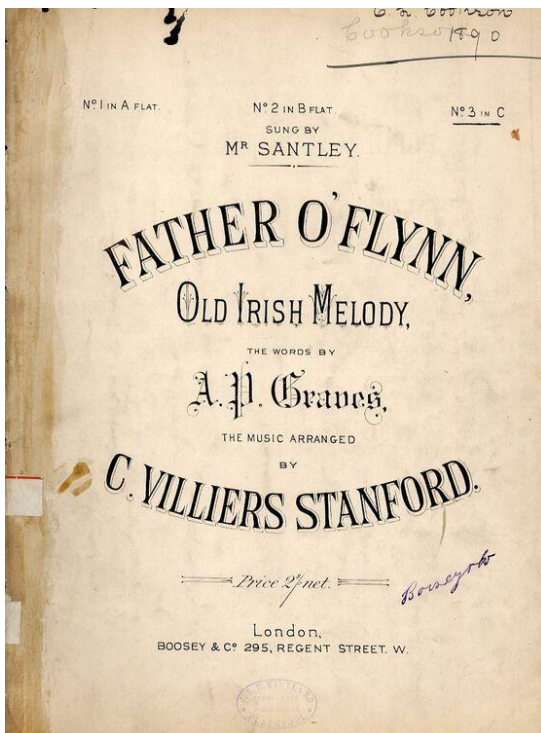
¹⁵ Bob Frewen, *Father O'Flynn, the Man, the Song*, <http://www.stmichaelschurchnseem.org/frwalsh.pdf>, retrieved 3.9.2023. The Bland in question must be James Franklin Bland (1850-1927).

¹⁶ The father of Alfred Perceval and Charles Larcom Graves was Charles Graves (1812-1899), the Protestant Bishop of Limerick.

¹⁷ Harry Plunket Greene, *Charles Villiers Stanford*, Edward Arnold & Co., 1935, p.169.

Graves protested and said it was humorous not comic, to which Stanford replied: "All right, old chap, we'll throw it in with the rest".¹⁸

Now we are back to the idea that Graves supplied the poem ready fitted to the tune, though we do not know which form of it. Greene sounds as if he is writing from inside knowledge, but in 1882 he had yet to meet Stanford. He evidently had access to letters from Stanford to Graves¹⁹ but, as his remark about the tune originating in Petrie shows, he was inclined to confuse things heard somewhere with facts²⁰. Ultimately, whether we look on the Graves/Stanford *Father O'Flynn* as a Kerry variant of *The Top of Cork Road*, as an adaptation by Graves or as a semi-creation by Stanford, the two are sufficiently different that it would make sense to reserve the name *Father O'Flynn* for the song and stick to *The Top of Cork Road* for the dance. However, considering that, as early as 1917, the accordionist Patrick J. Scanlon recorded what is plainly *The Top of Cork Road* with the title of *Father O'Flynn* (Columbia A 2837), it is a bit late in the day to try to impose a logical separation now.



A logical separation is needed, though, for Stanford's two settings of *Father O'Flynn*²¹. So far, all references have been to its inclusion in *Songs of Old Ireland*, but a separate edition was issued with sufficient differences to justify an entry of its own in catalogues of the composer's work. In *Songs of Old Ireland*, the voice enters without an introduction, in the separate edition the piano has a four-bar prelude. Each verse ends, in *Songs of Old Ireland*, with the briefest of piano flourishes, just an echo of the last four notes of the tune. In the separate edition, this is lengthened by one bar. In *Songs of Old Ireland*, the refrain "Slainté and slainté ..." is to be sung by a chorus in two parts and, additionally, the melodic line in the third bar of the refrain is slightly different – see appendices 4 and 5. There are small rhythmic variants – dotted rhythms in one but not in the other – all through. Enough, surely, to treat them as two independent settings. But which came first?

Songs of Old Ireland bears a dedication to Brahms, dated August 1882. Boosey announced its publication with an advertisement in *The Musical Times* of September 1882. The separate setting has no publication date and Hudson²² gives 1882 in square brackets, evidently presuming it was a simple offprint from *Songs of Old Ireland*. The British Library catalogue entry does not suggest a date, but the actual copy has an accession date

¹⁸ Ibid., p.170.

¹⁹ He quotes quite a few in detail (pp.171-5), but not any dealing with *Father O'Flynn* and mostly concerning later collaborations.

²⁰ As we have seen, *The Top of Cork Road* was from Joyce not Petrie, though Graves and/or Stanford may have known a different version.

²¹ He also used the tune in his opera *Shamus O'Brien*, at the beginning of the overture and then as a leitmotif for Father O'Flynn, who appears as one of the characters.

²² Frederick Hudson: *A New Catalogue of the Works of Charles Villiers Stanford 1852-1924*, Compiled from the Original Sources, typescript 1994. Held in the Stanford Collection of Newcastle University and accessible here: https://www.ncl.ac.uk/webtemplate/libraryassets/external/special-collectionsguide/handlists/stanford_charles_villiers_archive.pdf. Retrieved 13.4.2022.

of 3 February 1882. So it was issued slightly earlier²³. Moreover, singers evidently preferred it. While *Songs of Old Ireland* as a volume circulated widely in its day, all eleven recordings of *Father O'Flynn* that I have heard, set down in the years 1899 to 1931, clearly follow the separate edition.

The separate editions of *Father O'Flynn* and a few others all bear, on their title page, the name of the singer who performed them. There seems to be a link here with a concert that was to all effects a public presentation of *Songs of Old Ireland*. Greene has some interesting information about the concert, but gives no date²⁴:

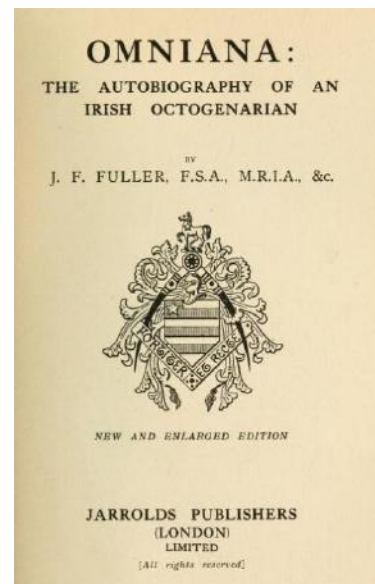
By the time the book was published Stanford had fallen out with John Boosey, who then turned to Graves for consultation as to the right professionals to sing them and the right songs for the occasion, namely the forthcoming Ballad Concert. He made suggestions, all but one of which were accepted by John Boosey. The exception was "Father O'Flynn – which Graves proposed should be allotted to Santley. To this Boosey demurred on the grounds that Santley had lately become a Catholic. "All the more reason", said Graves, "for asking a man with the courage of his opinions to sing it". Boosey did not reply, but Graves was afterwards told by Mary Davies²⁵, who was also taking part in the concert, that when the singers engaged for it were looking over the songs, Santley who had been humming "Father O'Flynn" to himself cried out, "This is my song for certain". The day after the Concert Graves got a post card from Stanford (which he kept afterwards as a trophy), informing him of the success of the songs and more particularly of "Father O'Flynn", "which Santley sang in the creamiest brogue" and for which he got a treble encore.²⁶

Charles Larcom Graves noted slightly later that Santley's "brogue is so good ... that I wonder he has not been claimed as a native of Ireland by my compatriots"²⁷.

The separate edition of *Father O'Flynn* is likely to have arisen from the need to provide Santley with a version better suited to the concert platform, but in the absence of firm dates it is difficult to speculate further.

Time, now, to take a look at Father Michael – more properly Mihil – Walsh, the avowed original of *Father O'Flynn*. The fullest account seems to come from James Franklin Fuller (1835-1924), a prominent if controversial architect in his day and related to the Blands of Derryquin Castle.

When the day came for departure from Kerry, I felt that, next to father and mother, the person whom I should miss most was the fine old parish priest, Father Welsh [sic!]; with whom I often put in a strenuous day's coursing – a sport of which he was very fond and which meant vigorous exercise, tramping mountains, jumping rocks, fording streams, and negotiating bogs; giving the greyhounds, as well as ourselves, enough to do, and the hare a



²³ As were the separate issues of *The Foggy Dew*, *A Sailor Lad* and *'Twas Pretty to be in Balinderry*. Whereas the separate issues of *An Irish Lullaby* and *The Willow Tree* have accession dates of 5 February 1884 and 3 April 1884 respectively. I have not seen all of these separate issues, but those that I have seen do not show variants similar to those in *Father O'Flynn*.

²⁴ A search in *The Musical Times* covering the years 1881 to 1884 discovered no mention of this concert.

²⁵ Mary Davies sang *A Sailor Lad* at this concert.

²⁶ Greene, *ibid.*, pp.170-171.

²⁷ C. L. Graves, *ibid.*, p.582.

sporting chance of escape. He was in every sense a grand old man; beloved by his flock, and standing high in the estimation of all the Protestant gentry of the parish, including the members of the family of the learned Dr. Graves, afterwards Bishop of Limerick, who resided at Parknasilla; and he was moreover the original of "Father O'Flynn", rendered famous by the bishop's son, Alfred Perceval Graves. ...

He spoke Irish fluently – which was necessary in a parish where not a few peasants in those days spoke no English ... He was a large-bodied, as well as a large-hearted man.²⁸

Back to the song itself, how is it to be performed?

Nobody pitches in with more verve than Stanford himself in his 1916 recording of the *Shamus O'Brien* Overture, with Sir Hamilton Harty in 1922 a close second. There is plenty of spirit in a modern version by Douglas Bostock (2001). Other performances seem to want to relate the music to a tempo at which it can be sung but, as Charles Larcom Graves pointed out long ago, "It will be readily be understood that as a jig-tune it is played nearly twice as fast as when sung by Mr. Santley"²⁹. Or by most others, if we are to hear the words. The introductions to almost all the recordings I have heard sound unduly slow, but the tempo proves to be right when the voice enters.

As well as being the original interpreter, and seemingly delighting Stanford with his "creamiest brogue", Santley remained particularly associated with the song, though James Franklin Fuller also found Signor Foli irresistible – this celebrated bass singer was actually Allan James Foley (1837-1899) and as Irish as they come. Foli's interpretation is lost to us, but Sir Charles Santley (1834-1922) set down a recording around 1911 (Columbia 373, issued 1913). His voice is inevitably that of an elderly man, but it is still wonderfully even, perfectly pitched and his words, at a fairly comfortable tempo, are crystal clear. He omits the second verse – maybe "Dad and the devils and all at Divinity" was too much for his Catholic sensibility. Not only does he not attempt a jig tempo, he separates the phrases in a way that would make dancing impossible. Apart from this, he does not take particular liberties with the music and, though his brogue sounds authentic to my English ears, there is nothing camp about it.

Santley was by no means the first to record *Father O'Flynn* – I have heard four earlier versions. The earliest, presumably, was Montague Borwell, whose Berliner E-3121 was published on 14 October 1899. Despite the fierce crackle, his voice comes over remarkably well. The interpretation seems modelled on Santley's though a little plain beside his. For reasons of space, probably, he sings only the first three verses. He provides an unwritten high note towards the end.

A special interest attaches to the recording by Harry Plunket Greene (G&T GC3-2018, 22 January 1904), given his closeness to Stanford and his status as the first interpreter of so many of his songs, even if not this one. Greene recalls his first meeting with Stanford, in 1888, as follows:

... he asked me if I knew the tunes in the Songs of Old Ireland volume which he and Alfred Graves had brought out between them some time before. I was more or less German minded still and had never heard of them. He sat down at the piano and played them to me one after another. ... When I think back on it now I can understand the secret of his semi-miraculous teaching powers. I remember that he never said a word as to how the tunes should be handled; yet with his playing he seemed to reveal

²⁸ James Franklin Fuller, *Omniana: the Autobiography of an Irish Octogenarian*, Smith, Elder, London 1916, new and enlarged edition Jarrolds, London 1920, pp.58-60. The additional information given by Frewer, *ibid.*, is worth seeking out. He does not always give sources, but the site is a local one so may draw upon knowledge that has been handed down.

²⁹ *ibid.*, p.582.

*not only how they should be played but how all music should be felt. ... It was a lifelong lesson, over in an hour or so, and given without a word.*³⁰

Greene's interpretative methods deserve close study – and he is fortunate in have a pianist who understands them. The piano introduction, the interludes at the end of each verse are brisk, with much of the verve of Stanford's own conducting. Dare we speculate that Stanford himself might have been playing? Greene himself rips through the beginning of the refrain and sings some other lines very fast, while taking time to savour others. The impression is not one of pulling the music around. Rather, he seems to find time to make his points by stretching a basically fast tempo, to which he always returns before the momentum is lost. He sings all four verses and he makes some tiny changes to the words – in particular, "young childer" become "wee childer". At one point, the pianist improvises a different harmony – would anyone but Stanford himself have ventured to do this? As an additional point of interest, Greene is the only Irish singer from whom I have found a recording – so we can take his brogue for granted.

Stanford's Irish vein was well regarded in the United States in his own day, especially where the Irish communities were strong. The earliest American version known to me was set down by William Hooley on 27 April 1905 (Victor 4857). This has an orchestral accompaniment, probably not Stanford's own³¹. He finds space for all four verses and alters the melodic line slightly in the refrain. As with Borwell, it is a good straightforward performance without the personality of Santley's.

Back in the UK, in 1906 the Scottish bass-baritone Andrew Black set down a version (G&T G.C.3-24344) that is closer to the Greene mould than that of Santley. The tempo is about as close to a jig as can be managed, though the pianist seems to want him to go faster still – and catches a magnificent crab in his final chord. It's a vivid rendering, with all four verses, a splendid voice, clear words and convincing brogue.

Post-Santley (but prior to the issue of Santley's recording), the American bass-baritone Frank Croxton's version came out in 1912 (Edison Blue Amberol 1805). Like Hooley's, it has orchestral accompaniment – or maybe it is a brass band. Another evenly produced voice – there seems to have been no shortage of them in those days. He caresses the words, sometimes going slow in an already moderate tempo³² and sings all four verses. Between the verses, the band plays the introduction again in place of Stanford's brief interlude.

Still in the USA, Arthur Middleton (Edison Matrix 4770, New York 6 June 1916) has orchestral accompaniment, a fine resonant voice, all four verses and clear diction. It is, however, a very mannered performance, alternating moments in very slow tempo with sudden throw-away lines at breakneck speed. Perhaps if you were there, hanging onto his every word, it made sense, but I would not like to live with this on disc. A comparison between this and Greene could not demonstrate better the difference between natural flexibility and playing fast and loose with the music.

In 1925, or thereabouts, the English bass Harry Brindle set down his version on Velvet Face Edison 653. He has orchestral accompaniment, all four verses and here is yet another even, resonant bass voice. He begins in a straightforward manner at a rather stately tempo. Later he indulges in some excessive point-making, including a long *tenuto* on a single note – hear him at "Still for all you've so gentle a soul". Like Borwell, he sings an unscripted high note towards the end. Brindle, by the way, took the part of Father O'Flynn in a 1930 broadcast of *Shamus O'Brien* conducted by Percy Pitt.

³⁰ Greene, *ibid.*, p.85.

³¹ There is no record of an orchestral version by Stanford himself.

³² With all these old recordings, I am at the mercy of the transferor's decision over the record speeds. In most cases, the voice sounds sufficiently convincing to silence doubts, but I have heard this in both A and A flat. Since the tempo is already slowish, I tend give credence to that in A.

A better remembered singer, Nottingham-born Robert Radford, recorded *Father O'Flynn* on 11 November 1925 (HMV E.420). Back in 1918, Radford had worked on a recording of *Songs of the Sea* with Stanford himself conducting. This would seem to give him some authority as a Stanford singer, except that all of their numerous takes were rejected and the performance never saw the light of day. I don't think anybody knows who rejected the takes and why, but the suspicion remains that Stanford was dissatisfied with the singer. Still, this performance, even more than Black's, captures much of the dash with which Stanford had conducted the music in *Shamus Overture* and goes some way to belie C. L. Graves' contention that a sung performance has to be almost half the tempo of the jig. With piano accompaniment and all four verses, Radford is more than a minute shorter than Brindle – and quicker than Greene, too. In a song so short, this amounts to between 25 and 30 per cent. Words are vividly clear and occasional point-making is not allowed to disturb the flow. The one eccentricity is his use of a sort of *Sprechstimme* at "Is it lave gaiety all to the laity".

Another well-remembered singer, the British bass Norman Allin, takes time to savour his words. With few concessions to Irish dialect and with orchestral accompaniment, this performance, delightful in its way, seems to transport the song to the operatic stage. The knowing gulp at "Och, Father O'Flynn, you've a wonderful way wid you" recalls old-style performances of *Figaro* and *Barbiere*. He sings all four verses (Columbia 01577, issued 1929).

The Australian Peter Dawson (HMV B 633, 10 March 1931) comes closer than most to Santley's "creamiest brogue" and, like Santley, he offers a straightforward performance in which he manages to savour the words without disturbing the flow. He has orchestral accompaniment and sings all four verses. He sings the unscripted high note towards the end. He also sings another high note, at the beginning of the last refrain. This is actually marked as an alternative in the score, though nobody else has done it. A Peter Dawson performance of this sort of repertoire could hardly be less than excellent, but this is not quite one of his most treasurable discs. It has a slight air of "doing a good job". Still, if you want to hear the song without the fierce hiss and crackle of the earliest recordings, you can reliably go here.

Given my interest in forgotten artists, it slightly irks me to have to admit that the five most famous names – Santley, Greene, Radford, Allin and Dawson – have between them said all there is to be said about *Father O'Flynn*, with Santley and Greene still supreme in many ways. Maybe others thought this too, for I have no information about any recording more recent than the Dawson³³. Perhaps the song began to lose its appeal, though I think amateurs were still singing it in the 1950s and maybe some still do – it remains in print. The considerable Stanford revival since the 1990s has not so far produced a new *Father O'Flynn*. Do people feel there is something "politically incorrect" about this typecasting of a jolly Irish priest?

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³³ The most recent broadcasts to show up in the BBC Genome site were by Dennis Noble in 1960 and Ian Wallace in 1966.

Appendix 1: *The Top of Cork Road* as printed in Joyce. For purposes of easy comparison, all tunes in these appendices have been put into C major.



Appendix 2: *Father O'Flynn* as it appears in Stanford's separately published arrangement:



Appendix 3: *Yorkshire Lassies* from the 1799 manuscript of John Miller of Perth.



Appendix 4: Part of the refrain of *Father O'Flynn* as it appears in *Songs of Old Ireland*:

Chorus

Here's a health to you Father O'Flynn, Slainte and slainte and

f *sf*

This image shows a handwritten musical score for the refrain of 'Father O'Flynn' as it appears in 'Songs of Old Ireland'. The score is written on three staves. The top staff is for the vocal line, starting with a treble clef and a common time signature. The lyrics are written below the notes. The middle and bottom staves are for the piano accompaniment, with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The piano part includes dynamic markings such as *f* and *sf*. The music is in a simple, folk-like style with a clear melody and accompaniment.

Appendix 5: Part of the refrain of *Father O'Flynn* as it appears in the separate edition:

Here's a health to you Father O'Flynn, Slainte and slainte and

f *sf*

This image shows a handwritten musical score for the refrain of 'Father O'Flynn' as it appears in a separate edition. The score is written on three staves. The top staff is for the vocal line, starting with a treble clef and a common time signature. The lyrics are written below the notes. The middle and bottom staves are for the piano accompaniment, with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The piano part includes dynamic markings such as *f* and *sf*. The music is in a simple, folk-like style with a clear melody and accompaniment.

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